



White Sands National Monument

SHIMMERING wavelike dunes, fresh as a wilderness snowfall, blanket a vast area in the Tularosa Valley. Ever growing, ever changing, the hills inch forward before the prevailing southwest winds.

The world's largest gypsum desert was created millennia ago when the mineral was washed from the flanking San Andres Mountains, deposited in dry lake beds, and blown by winds into dunes—a process still going on. Established in 1933, White Sands National Monument preserves nearly 230 square miles of the starkly beautiful landscape.

For the thousands of visitors who come here each year, the Park Service devised sail-like picnic shelters (lower left). To keep a way open for cars, employees spend countless hours grading and scraping away the sugar-fine sand.

Surprisingly, the desert supports much plant life—yucca, squawbush, rabbitbrush, cottonwood. Many animals, including badger, skunk, fox, rabbit, coyote, gopher, and kangaroo rat, make excursions into it. A permanent inhabitant of the dunes is the bleached earless lizard, *Holbrookia maculata ruthveni* (left).

